

FUNDAMENTAL VERSUS ALLEGORIC: WAR AND PEACE IN ISLAM

Zia H Shah MD

Permission to take up arms is given to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged and Allah, indeed, has power to help them. (22:40)

أَفِذْنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ
نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Followers of all religions can make tall claims about the beauty of their religions. In view of that, Promised Messiah^{as} the lead follower of the Prophet Muhammad^{aw}, his holiness Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has laid down a beautiful criterion that followers of all religions need to support their claims from their scriptures. In that spirit majority of the references in this article are from the Holy Quran.

DEFENSIVE NATURE OF MUSLIM WARS



It was year 610 AD in the last ten days of the blessed month of Ramadhan, when the Holy Prophet^{saw}, was occupied in worship in the cave Hira that he suddenly perceived an unfamiliar presence before him. It addressed him and said, 'Recite', to which he replied: 'I am not able to recite'. Thereupon the presence seized him and, clasping him to its bosom, squeezed him hard and then, releasing him, directed him again, 'Recite', and received the same reply as the first time. This was repeated once more, as if the embrace had been intended each time to influence Muhammad's heart and to prepare him for the message that was to be delivered to him. After the third embrace, the presence released the Holy Prophet^{saw} and directed him: 'Recite in the name of thy Lord Who created. He created man from a clot of blood. Recite, for thy Lord is the Most Beneficent, Who has taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not'. (96:2-6)

The Holy Prophet's preaching of this message of one God unleashed the fury and the prejudices of the Meccan polytheist society. The Meccans knew no limits in persecuting the Muslim minority. Many of the early Muslims were tortured and killed. Later on the weak among the Muslims were forced to migrate to the land of a compassionate Christian king in Abyssinia. Yet there seemed to be no end to persecution. In the tenth year of the Holy Prophet's ministry Meccans perpetuated a complete social and commercial boycott against all the Muslims. Their thirst of hatred and jealousy was not quenched by all these cruelties and they launched the conspiracy to kill the prophet. This is mentioned in the Holy Quran, "Call to mind the time, when the disbelievers plotted against thee that they might confine thee, or kill thee, or expel thee. They planned and Allah also planned, and Allah is the Best of planners." (8:31) The Holy Prophet was forced to migrate to Medina in 622 AD. This did not put an end to the hostile activities of the Meccans. Peace was denied to the Prophet and the Muslims even in Medina. It was in these circumstances that the Muslims were accorded Divine permission to take up arms in defense of freedom of conscience. Allah said and it is recorded in Sura Hajj, "Permission to fight is granted to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged, and Allah indeed has power to help them. They are those who have been driven out of their homes unjustly only because they affirmed, 'Our Lord is Allah'. If Allah did not repel aggression of some people by means of others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is often commemorated, would surely be destroyed." (22:41-2) Only defensive war was to be permitted. There was no room for Pre-emptive strike in Islam. Any motive other than the safeguarding of the faith and putting down any mischief against it was regarded as inconsistent with the purpose of Jihad. The Holy Prophet^{saw} had announced that anyone who went forth to battle for the sake of spoils, or for the display of his bravery, or for any other worldly motive, disintitiled himself to any spiritual reward.

FUNDAMENTAL VERSUS ALLEGORIC VERSES

The eighth verse of the third chapter of the Holy Quran supplies the believers with a sure and trust worthy principle of interpreting revealed Books, or, for that matter, any writing or speech, in a right manner, "Allah it is who has sent down to thee the Book; in it there are verses that are fundamental -- they are the basis of the Book -- and there are others which are allegoric. But those in whose hearts is perversity pursue such thereof as are allegoric, seeking to create confusion and to pervert their meaning. And none knows its right interpretation except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge." (3:8) The principle is to follow the fundamental teachings and interpret the allegoric teachings in their light rather than other way around. People who have an axe to grind misinterpret a some what vague statement and then mold rest of the writing or speech in that light.

The verses of Sura Hajj mentioned above are the fundamental teachings in regards to defensive warfare that is allowed in Islam. The other verses that should be considered fundamental on this issue are the verses 191-194 of the second chapter of the Holy Quran.

Fighting is permissible only to repel or halt aggression; but even in the course of such fighting; Muslims are not permitted to adopt unduly aggressive measures. "Fight in the cause of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Surely, Allah loves not the transgressors." (2: 191) 'Persecution is worse than killing', for it seeks to destroy the soul. (2:192) Therefore, "fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for the sake of Allah; but if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors." (2: 194) The phrase 'but if they desist' is mentioned not only in verse 193 but also in 194 clearly sealing the interpretation that the warfare is only defensive.

Pertaining to these set of verses Sir Muhammad Zafarulla Khan, who was perhaps one of the best legal minds of the last century has written, "**These are basic and fundamental directives. There is a host of other directions in the Quran with regard to the prosecution of war, but they are all subject to the conditions here laid down, and must be so construed.**"¹ Once one understands the guiding principles on the issue of war and peace the details become self evident to the well read. These principles also help us defend any criticism, leveled by the nonbelievers against the peaceful teachings of Islam.

DEFINING WAR AND PEACE

At the time of the Holy Prophet^{saw}, the tribes of Arabia were sunk into mutual warfare. In Mecca, a unilateral war like situation was forced on the Muslims. The majority knew no bounds in exploiting the Muslim minority. In the thirteenth year of the ministry of the Holy Prophet^{saw},

Meccans had hatched a plan to kill the Holy Prophet^{saw}. (8:31) In Medina the Muslims found themselves in a very precarious and unenviable situation. Their security was threatened not only by Quraish, who had put a price on the head of the Holy Prophet^{saw}, and had followed this up by serving an ultimatum, through Abdullah bin Ubayy, that unless the Holy Prophet was expelled from Medina, they would invade Medina in full strength and slaughter all the men in it and enslave all the women. Moreover, the Muslims were not secure against the machinations of the disaffected in Medina, and had to be wary of the Jews. Quraish had declared war upon the Holy Prophet^{saw} and the Muslims and all those who might support them. The state of war thus initiated continued for six years after Hijra and was interrupted only by the Truce of Hudaibiyya. Less than two years later Quraish committed a glaring breach of the Truce and hostilities broke out again which were terminated only when the greater part of the peninsula had acknowledged the supremacy of the Islamic state and had submitted to it. So, during the time of the Holy Prophet^{saw} there were two main wars one before Hudaibiyya and one after that. All the different military confrontations should be considered as different battles of these two main wars.

PURPOSE OF WARS

What is the purpose or the need of wars in a religion of peace? Going back to the fundamental verses in this regard, Allah says, “If Allah were to not prevent the aggression of one group by another group the safety of cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft remembered, would surely have been destroyed.” (22:41) In this verse by mentioning the places of worship of other religions before the Muslim mosques, the Holy Quran is very eloquently declaring religious freedom for the whole mankind. We read a similar message in Sura Baqarah, “If Allah were not to repel a section of mankind by another, the earth would be filled with disorder, but Allah is full of bounty towards all peoples.” (2:252). Here again the stress is on ‘all people’, so the purpose of wars is not to collect spoils or to seek political advantage, but to restore religious freedom for ‘all people’.

Likewise, the inducements for struggle in this dimension are not worldly, mundane or political. Muslims were invited to participate in defensive warfare for spiritual gains. They were to resign themselves to the will of Allah. When they will participate in the lesser Jihad they could be either successful and called Ghazi or they could be martyred. It was promised that the martyrs have a very high spiritual status. The Holy Quran promised:

And whoso obeys Allah and this Messenger shall be among those on whom Allah has bestowed His blessings - the Prophets, the Truthful, the Martyrs, and the Righteous. And an excellent company are they. (4:70)

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا ۗ

A SPIRITUAL PARADIGM

Permission to take up arms in defense was granted to the Muslims, but so far as numbers and material resources were concerned, the Muslims were at a fearful disadvantage compared to the Quraish. The Muslims were in no position to take the field against an enemy as powerful as Quraish. Indeed, they shrank from the prospect, as is said, “Fighting is ordained for you, while it is repugnant to you. It may be that you dislike a thing, which is good for you, and it may also be that you prefer a thing and it may be the worse for you. Allah knows all and you know not.” (2:217). Therefore, the verses of Sura Hajj that allowed defensive war highlighted that Allah is Mighty and Powerful and fully capable of helping the rightful party. The verses said, “And Allah will, surely, help him who helps Him. Allah is, indeed, Powerful, Mighty. And with Allah rests the final issue of all affairs.” Al Hajj 22:41-42. In view of this and other teachings of the Holy Quran it was a practice of the Holy Prophet^{saw}, to make supplications to the Divine, along with the whole of his company, before setting out for any battle. He prayed fervently again, alone this time, before he encountered the enemy in the field of battle.

At the time of Badr, Allah intended to punish the non-believers, who had persecuted the Muslims for 13 long years. Allah would not do that while the Holy Prophet^{saw} remained among them. (8:33-35) But now, a year after the migration, as the Meccans were preparing to invade Medina, Allah decided to cut off the source of their strength. (8:8-9) The non-Muslims and the hypocrites had their secular model of assessing the warfare based purely on military strength and strategy. (8:48-50) As the Muslims moved towards Badr, going by the disparity in military strength between the Muslims and the Meccan Army, the hypocrites thought that religion of Islam had deluded the believers and marred their judgment. (8:50) But, Allah had a different vision. He promised to the Muslims victory over one of the two parties of the nonbelievers, the lightly armed trade caravan or their well armed army. (8:8) The Muslims in their physical weakness were hoping that it will be the lightly armed trade caravan. (8:8) But Allah had plan to crush the well armed army of the Meccans. (8:8-9) There were several physical means that Allah used to help

the Muslim army. As is Allah's wont that He intervenes in human affairs through the laws of nature. (30:31) Before the war the Muslims saw the Meccan army, as relatively weak, as part of the army was behind the hill. (3:14 & 8:44-45) This helped the Muslims with their morale. At the time of the armed struggle, Allah also bestowed on the believers drowsiness, as a source of tranquility for them. (8:12) In addition, there was rain which based on the camping sites of the two armies, helped the Muslim army and undermined the enemies. (8:12) Moreover, when the Holy Prophet^{saw} threw a handful of gravel in the direction of the enemy, it started a wind in that direction, to the detriment of the enemies. (8:18-19) Allah was giving the believers a new paradigm that wars were to be fought not based on one's military strength alone, but on principles and hope of Allah's help and favor. (8:11 & 22:40). Actually help of Allah could be used as a criterion to judge the fairness or reasonability of the cause. If Allah's succor and help was not forthcoming one needed to reevaluate the righteousness of the cause. (22:40)

With this spiritual paradigm, the companions of the Holy Prophet^{saw} looked at this defensive war as a no loss situation. It was victory for the victorious or martyrdom. The concept of martyrdom was described at the time of the battle of Uhad. To the ordinary eye, martyrs are not in this world and hence not alive, but in a spiritual sense martyrs are alive (2:155), and recipients of special favors of Allah. Allah said:

Think not of those, who have been slain in the cause of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living, in the presence of their Lord, and are granted **gifts from Him**. (3:170)

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتًا بَلْ
أَحْيَاءُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾



Mountain of Uhud

What could be more exciting than gifts from Allah!

Allah's succor in the war, in the spiritual paradigm, however, was not a magical wand or Aladdin's lamp that could be wished, on the spur of the moment. One had to be deserving of that. At the time of Uhud when a party among the Muslims fell short in their behavior, the Muslims had a set back and suffered the consequences. (3:153-154)

TREATMENT OF THE ENEMIES

As was mentioned above, there is no preemptive war in Islam. Islam regards war as an abnormal and destructive activity, to which recourse can be had only as the last resort. But even a defensive war is not a license to wanton killing of the enemy. The Holy Quran lays great emphasis on the sanctity of human life. To stress the enormity of killing an innocent life the Holy Quran equates such a crime to a holocaust. The Holy Quran says: We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killed a person - unless it be for killing a person or for creating disorder in the land - it shall be as if he killed all mankind. (5:33)

Proportionate use of force is stressed in the Holy Quran. (2:191) The Holy Quran tells us that The Holy Prophet^{saw} is an excellent role model for the believers. (33:22) He was not only mindful of the Muslim casualties in the war but was also considerate to minimize the damage to the enemies. His compassionate treatment of the Meccans at the time of Fall of Mecca, after 21 years of long drawn political and military struggle knows no equal in human history.

The Holy Quran says about the Christians, “And thou shalt assuredly find those who say, 'We are Christians,' to be the nearest of them in friendship to the believers. That is because among them are savants and monks and because they are not arrogant.” (5:83) Let us study the events of Fall of Mecca through the eyes of three fair minded Christian historians, Stanley Lane-Pool, Godfrey Higgins and Rev. Bosworth Smith. These writers are impressed and appalled by the treatment meted out to the life long enemies.



Kaaba in 1880s

“Now would have been the moment to gratify his ambition, to satiate his lust, to get his revenge. Read the account of Muhammad's entry into Mecca, side by side with that of Marius or Sulla into

Rome, and we shall then be in a position, to better appreciate the magnanimity and moderation of the Prophet of Arabia,"² writes Rev. Bosworth Smith. In the eighth year after Hijra, when a body of Quraish broke the truce of Hudaibiyya by attacking an ally of the Muslims; and the prophet marched forth upon Mecca, with ten thousand believers and the city defense being hopeless, surrendered. Now, his old persecutors were at his feet! Will he not trample them? Will he not torture them; revenge himself after their cruel manner? There were no proscription lists, no plunder, and no wanton revenge. Godfrey Higgins is flabbergasted, "But what is this? Is there no blood in the streets? Where are the bodies of the thousands that have been butchered? Facts are hard things; and it is a fact that the day of Muhammad's greatest triumph over his enemies was also the day of his grandest victory over himself. He freely forgave the Quraish all the years of sorrow and cruel scorn they had inflicted on him; he gave an amnesty to the whole population of Mecca."³ Historian Lane Poole concludes, "Through all the annals of conquest, there is no triumphant entry like unto this one."⁴

PRISONERS OF WAR

The treatment of the prisoners of Badr when contrasted with the treatment of the prisoners of Guantanamo establishes the superiority of the teachings of Islam over all other religious and secular philosophies. Prisoners could only be taken in actual fighting during the course of a justified, regular war. Allah says, "And when you meet in regular battle those who disbelieve, smite their necks; and, when you have overcome them, by causing great slaughter among them, bind fast the fetters - then afterwards either release them as a favor or by taking ransom - until the war lays down its burdens. That is the ordinance." (47:5) Tribal raids were not permitted and prisoners could not be taken in scouting skirmishes or chance encounters. "It does not behoove a Prophet that he should have captives until he engages in regular fighting in the land. You desire the goods of this world. While Allah desires for you the Hereafter. Allah is Mighty and Wise." (8: 68).

In many cases prisoners of war were released without exchange or ransom as a matter of favor (47: 5). Ransom could be very light. After the battle of Badr, it was announced that the ransom of a literate prisoner would be that he should teach Arabic alphabets to ten Muslim children.⁵

Those who could be put to work were entitled to be set free to work on their own, if they so desired, and to ransom themselves out of their earnings. They could obtain writing to that effect and were to be helped in carrying out the obligation thus undertaken. In such a situation they were set at liberty so that they could earn their wages freely. Indeed, those to whom they were allotted were themselves urged to contribute towards the payment of their ransom, as an act of

benevolence, as is said, "Write out a deed of manumission for such of those under your control as desire it, if you see some good in them, and help them to secure their freedom with a portion of the wealth of Allah which He has bestowed upon you." (24:34)

ETHICS OF WAR

The teachings of the Holy Quran in war and peace excel those of the Universal Declaration of human rights and of the Geneva Convention. According to Islam, should war become unavoidable, every effort must be made to limit its mischief and horror and to bring hostilities to a close as early as possible. Muslims were forbidden to pillage or plunder. Savage practices like disfiguring the enemy dead and torturing prisoners of war, which were common in pre-Islamic Arabia, are prohibited altogether in Islam. With regard to customs and practices not in themselves barbaric or revolting, the principle laid down is that the Muslims might extend reciprocal treatment to the enemy, and might retaliate to the extent to which an injury or a wrong is inflicted upon them, but that the better part would be to endure and to forgive (16:127). The fact that the 'Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field' was not signed until 1864 by the Western world, and even then has not been universal in its application, speaks volumes about the leading role of Islam in the sphere of human rights and individual human dignity.

However, forgiving the enemy is not an obligation on the Muslim forces. Exercise of wisdom will be the guiding principle. The Holy Quran has laid down the fundamental principle that forgiveness is to promote reformation. If forgiveness does not serve that purpose then the punishment should be proportionate to the crime. The Holy Quran lays down this fundamental principle that should be the guide post of every Muslim both in war and in peace.

Remember that the recompense of an injury is an injury the like thereof; but whoso forgives and thereby brings about an improvement, his reward is with Allah. Surely, He loves not the wrongdoers. (42:41)

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ
فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Under no circumstances a Muslim is allowed to transgress and retaliate beyond what the enemies are doing as, 'Allah. loves not the wrongdoers'. Under no circumstances are Muslims to violate the reasonable limits set by Allah, "And let not the enmity of a people, that they hindered you

from the Sacred Mosque, incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and in piety; but help not one another in sin and transgression. And fear Allah; Surely Allah is Severe in punishment.” (5:3)

When war becomes inevitable it should be so waged as to cause the least possible amount of damage to life and property; and that hostilities should be brought to a close as quickly as possible, as is said: ‘Whenever they kindle a fire for war, Allah extinguishes it. They strive to create disorder in the earth and Allah loves not those who create disorder’ (5:65). The total casualties in all the wars and battles fought during the life of the Holy Prophet^{saw} were no more than a thousand including the enemies. This contrasts with millions of casualties in the Civil War of USA, World War I and II.

A final effort was again made at the onset of battles as a last ditch effort to prevent fighting and casualties. Whenever the Holy Prophet may peace be upon him dispatched a force on such a campaign, he directed the commander that when the enemy were encountered, they should be invited to embrace Islam, and if they agreed they should be urged to migrate to Medina. If they became Muslims, but could not migrate, they were permitted to stay at home in peace. If the enemy rejected the invitation to accept Islam, they were invited to stop fighting the Muslims and to submit to the Islamic state. If they rejected all these offers, they should be fought.

The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, forbade severely any interference with the emissary of the enemy or doing him any harm or inflicting any injury upon him. On one occasion, some emissaries of disbelievers came to him and spoke very impertinently to him. He was provoked, but observed, ‘You are emissaries, and I am, therefore, not permitted to make a harsh retort to you.’⁶

When he dispatched a force on a campaign, he admonished them: ‘Muslims, go forth in the name of Allah, and fight in the cause of Allah. Do not defraud in the matter of the spoils, nor cheat the enemy. Do not mutilate the enemy dead nor kill women or children or monks or priests, nor those who have arrived at extreme old age. Always try to improve people’s condition and behave benevolently towards them. Allah loves the benevolent.’ In his time, Hazrat Abu Bakr used to add: ‘Leave alone those who have dedicated their lives to the service of God and also that to which they are dedicated; do not cut down fruit trees, nor ruin an inhabited place.’ All this was designed towards making war humane and to put an end to the inhuman practices that were current in Arabia before the advent of Islam. Muslims were forbidden to inflict an injury upon anyone’s face. The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, observed that a Muslim should be most careful in inflicting an injury.⁷

WAR INTELLIGENCE

Trust in Allah did not imply lack of preparation. (53:40) The Holy Prophet^{saw} prepared well for all his assignments. Warfare was no exception. He had established a fairly effective system of intelligence concerning the movements of the enemy. Those entrusted with this duty were instructed that they should not report to him when he was among company. If he received some intelligence, which occasioned anxiety, he did not make it public, and communicated it to only selected individuals. When he set out on an expedition he did not normally announce his goal. On some occasions he would proceed for a few miles in a direction different from the direction of his goal and would then veer round to the direction of his goal. When the Holy Prophet received intimation that an enemy tribe was preparing to attack the Muslims, he forestalled their design in order to frustrate it. On such occasions he so contrived that the Muslim force should arrive unexpectedly at the enemy encampment or settlement. This method safeguarded the Muslims to a large degree, and, in many cases, it rendered fighting unnecessary and thus safeguarded the enemy also.⁸

PEACE AND TREATIES

"Stop, stop!", Suhail, the Meccan emissary interrupted the Prophet Muhammad^{saw} again and again. He was negotiating peace treaty on behalf of Meccans at Hudaibiyya in the 6th year after Hijrah. He said, "If we thought you a prophet of God, we would not have fought you. Write as the custom is your own name and your father's name." The Prophet was not a man to quibble over minor details. "Write, then", the Holy Prophet continued the dictation, "Between Muhammad son of Abdullah, and Suhail ibn Amr." This tested the religious sensibility of the scribe Hazrat Ali. 'The Messenger of Allah', he protested, 'it would be a profanation to delete those words.' Thereupon, the Holy Prophet himself deleted those words. As the Holy Prophet was agreeing to every thing the Meccans were proposing, the companions took it as a humiliation and became very upset. Hazrat Umar the most zealous of all, could not restrain himself, he asked the Holy Prophet, "Are you not the Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet replied, "Most certainly I am". Then Hazrat Umar asked, "Are we not in the right?" "That is so", said the Holy Prophet. "Then why should we submit to such humiliation." The Holy Prophet pointed out, "Umar, I am only the Messenger of Allah, I cannot go against what he desires, and he alone is my helper." Hazrat Umar was still not completely satisfied and asked, "And were we not told by Allah that we would perform the circuit of Ka'ba?" The Holy Prophet replied, "Allah did foretell that, but he did not say when. I did judge as though it was going to be this year. But I could be wrong. Must it be this year?" Hazrat Umar was silenced. It seemed that the

Holy Prophet was pursuing peace at all cost. He knew what Hazrat Umar knew not! His compromise showed his deep yearning for peace, his passion for the sanctity of human life. He could not tolerate human blood spilled unnecessarily.

Such was the plight of the companions of the prophet in Hudaibiyya yet Allah called it a great victory. Allah said, "Indeed, we have granted thee a clear victory, That Allah may cover up for thee thy shortcomings, past and future, and that He may complete His favor upon thee, and may guide thee on a right path; And Allah may help thee with a mighty help" (48:2-4). It was a great victory indeed, as Islam spread far and wide once peace was achieved. It was a salient example that strength of Islam lay in peace and not in war. War was a last resort! It was a necessity but not a welcome one. War was an anomaly; peace was the goal and needed to be struck even at cost of looking humble and underling. Treaties of peace were to be signed whenever suitable opportunities presented themselves. Without a treaty there was no durable end of war, a mere postponement!

Muslims were enjoined strict fulfillment of their covenants and pledges. (9:4) In this also lies a seed for patriotism for Muslims living in Western world. The Holy Quran says that Muslims are to help the fellow Muslims but not against a people with whom they have a pact. (8:72) In other words pre-existing pacts or implied peaceful co-existence, will take precedence over physically helping fellow Muslims, at war with a country of one's residence. However, treaties cannot be used by a cunning party to exploit and cheat Muslims. The Muslims cannot be put in a double binding situation. The Holy Quran says, "Shouldst thou apprehend treachery from a people who have made a pact with thee, terminate the pact in a manner that should occasion no prejudice to either side. Surely, Allah loves not the treacherous. (8:59) The Holy Prophet^{saw} himself was most particular in regards to keeping the promises and treaties. On the occasion of the battle of Badr, Hudhaifah bin Yaman, having migrated from Mecca, joined the Holy Prophet and the Muslims just at the time when fighting was about to start. He submitted to the Holy Prophet that when he was about to leave Mecca, Quraish had made him promise that he would not take part in fighting against them. On learning this, the Holy Prophet directed him to fulfill his promise and to refrain from joining in the battle. This is an illustration of the extreme strictness of the Holy Prophet in such matters, even though in secular terms, a promise given under coercion would not be legally binding.

There were several treaties that the Holy Prophet^{saw} entered into. The first treaty signed at the time of Hijra can be considered the first ever constitution for a multi-religious community. Later in his ministry he signed an agreement with the Christians of Najran, when they came to Medina to learn about Islam. Some provisions of the peace treaty were:

Christians have the right to safety in their lives and property, and Muslims will respect those rights. No churches will be harmed, nor will any monasteries be closed nor priests impeded from their work.⁹

The Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was most particular with regard to the security and the rights of the pagans who established treaty relations with the Muslims. He observed, 'A Muslim who kills any covenanting pagan will not be permitted to perceive the breeze of paradise.' He also directed that a Muslim who should be guilty of killing a covenanting pagan by mistake must, in addition to paying his blood money to his heirs, also arrange to procure the freedom of a slave.¹⁰

ANSWERING SOME CRITICISMS

It is customary for some of the Western media that are not favorably poised towards Islam, to pick up one or two verses of the Holy Quran and quote them out of context to defame Islam. Such criticism occurs because of lack of appreciation of the fundamental verses of the Holy Quran on the subject of war and peace and taking the teaching out of context. For example, the following verse of Sura Tauba has been used to convey that Islam is in constant war with the non-believers.

And when the forbidden months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them and take them captive, and beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and observe Prayer and pay the Zakaat, then leave their way free. Surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful. (9:5)

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الشِّرْكَانَ
 حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَجِدُواهُمْ وَاحْصِرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا
 لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ إِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوْا
 الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

The fact of the matter is that this verse is not general in its scope and pertains to the polytheists who were in a state of war with the Muslims. This is a war time teaching when the war is raging and peace has not been secured by a treaty. This is amply clear from the 13th verse of the Sura, which states:

Will you not fight a people who have broken their oaths, and who plotted to turn out the Messenger, and they were the first to commence hostilities against you? Do you fear them? Nay, Allah is most worthy that you should fear Him, if you are believers. (9:13)

الَّذِينَ بَدَّلُوا مِيثَاقَهُمْ فَعَاهَدُوا فَيْدًا مِّنْهُم وَهُمْ كَذِبُونَ
 أَتَقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نُّكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ
 الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَءُواكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ أَتَخْشَوْنَ اللَّهَ
 أَحَقَّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

In time of peace the Holy Quran teaches freedom of religion and conscience for all. The fundamental verse for the time of peace is, “There is no compulsion in religion.” (2:257) Sometimes it is suggested by the Christian historians that Islam spread by sword. This is an extremely absurd allegation. Rather than going into the convoluted details of history this criticism can be explained easily on logical grounds. We can borrow a line of reasoning from Sir Thomas Carlyle, so that Christians are able to understand it easily. He was a famous British historian from the nineteenth century. He writes, “Much has been said of Muhammad’s propagating his Religion by the sword. It is no doubt far nobler what we have to boast of the Christian Religion, that it propagated itself peaceably in the way of preaching and conviction.” He continues his logic, “If we take this for an argument of the truth or falsehood of a religion, there is a radical mistake in it. The sword indeed: but where will you get your sword! Every new opinion, at its starting, is precisely in a minority of one. In one man’s head alone, there it dwells as yet.” He delivers his punch line by stating, “One man alone of the whole world believes it; there is one man against all men. That he take a sword, and try to propagate with that, will do little for him. You must first get your sword”!

CONCLUSION

What is fundamental about religious tolerance in Islam? It can be derived from what is known as the highest or the crown verse of the Holy Quran. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (1875 – 1936) the first British convert to Islam, quotes the crown verse of the Holy Quran and extrapolates religious tolerance from that:

“Allah! There is none to be worshipped save Him, the Alive, the Enduring. Age and slumber come not night Him. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with him save by His leave? He knoweth all that is in front of them and all that is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will, His throne ex-

tendeth beyond the Heavens and the Earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.’ (The Holy Quran 2:256)

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‘There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And whose rejecteth vain superstitions and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handle which will not give way. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.’ (The Holy Quran 2:257)

The two verses are supplementary. Where there is that realization of the majesty and dominion of Allah, there is no compulsion in religion. Men choose their path--allegiance or opposition--and it is sufficient punishment for those who oppose that they draw further and further away from the light of truth.

What Muslims do not generally consider is that this law applies to our own community just as much as to the folk outside, the laws of Allah being universal; and that intolerance of Muslims for other men's opinions and beliefs is evidence that they themselves have, at the moment, forgotten the vision of the Majesty and mercy of Allah which the Quran presents to them.”¹¹

Sword is to be wielded only in defense and mainly for freedom of religion for the whole humanity. Islam is a religion of peace. War is only an anomaly; an aberration! But when a war is forced on the Muslims it needs to be fought in a spiritual paradigm which counts on Allah's help. As has been said about the battle of Hunain:

Surely, Allah has helped you on many a battle field and on the day of Hunain, when your great numbers made you vain, but they availed you naught; and you were sore pressed, and then you turned your backs in retreat. Then Allah sent down tranquility from Himself upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and He sent down hosts which you did not see. (9:25-26)

The believers are to prepare for the war in a secular sense and remain united, (3:104) but ultimately the help comes from Allah. So they are to stay focused on prayers and remembrance of Allah, Who is All Powerful. Allah said:

O ye who believe! when you encounter an army, remain firm, and remember Allah much that you may prosper. And obey Allah and His Messenger and dispute not with one another, lest you falter and your power departs from you. And be steadfast; surely, Allah is with the steadfast. (8:46-47).

¹ Muhammad Zafarulla Khan. Islam and Human Rights. Islam International Publication Limited, 1999. Page 69.

² R. Bosworth Smith. Mohammed and Mohammedanism. It has several editions look in the second of the four lectures.

³ Godfrey Higgins. An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia called Mohamed or the Illustrious. It has several editions look in the Introduction.

⁴ Stanley Lane-Pool. Speeches and the Table Talk of the Prophet Muhammad. It has several editions look in the Introduction.

⁵ Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad: Sirat Khataman Nabiyyin II, p. 160, on the authority of Tabaqat Ibn Sa'ad.

⁶ Muhammad Zafarulla Khan. Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets. Chapter of Regulation of fighting.

⁷ Muhammad Zafarulla Khan. Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets. Chapter of Regulation of fighting.
http://www.alislam.org/library/books/muhammad_seal_of_the_prophets/chapter_06.html

⁸ Muhammad Zafarulla Khan. Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets. Chapter of Regulation of fighting.

http://www.alislam.org/library/books/muhammad_seal_of_the_prophets/chapter_06.html

⁹ Yahiya J. Emerick. Muhammad (Critical Lives). Alpha, a member of Penguin Group Ltd. Page 147-151.

¹⁰ Muhammad Zafarulla Khan. Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets. Chapter of Regulation of fighting.

¹¹ This was taken from a group of lectures given by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthal in 1925. These were published by The Committee of Madras Lectures on Islam in 1927, under the title Cultural Side of Islam. We have reproduced it from 1976 reprinting by the Publisher, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore, Pakistan. The lectures were also published under the title Islamic Culture by the University of Michigan in 1929.